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Early Attempts to Control Smallpox Epidemics
in California.

John C. McKinnis.

This is a short report on the efforts of James Ohio Pattie and others to control epidemics of smallpox which struck northern California and spread southward in the early 1800's. The records suggest as many unanswered questions as answers. The first complete journal of such activities was made by James Ohio Pattie from 1801 to 1803. The earlier participants are mentioned in the records of ships entering Monterey Bay. It was interesting to note that the earliest shipments of "lymph" was brought into Monterey on Russian ships. It is possible that it was brought as part of the efforts of the ships of the Russian-American Fur Company of Alaska to to gain the confidence of the Spanish. A few Russian-type fish per receipts did develop in sea Otter hunting after 1809.

It is not of on revealed. --- That one of the chief motives as avowed by the Spanish for the occupation of the coast from San Diego to Monterey by the expedition of 1769 had been the fear of Russian advance, --- from Alaska in search of sea otters, --- It was in 1806 that the Russians --- came into actual contact with the Spanish residing in California. They came as partners on "ooten ships" hunting sea otters and a possible colony site in California (1)

The earliest effort noted to control smallpox in California was in 1817 when a "Russian Jan-2-2" anchored in Monterey Bay and presented the Spanish with a quantity of "Smallpox lymph". No details have been found concerning its use or results. (2)

Next in 1821 the Russian Brigate Rusa or Kutusov came into Monterey Harbor and ship's Surgeon, Cecilia Forlin, came ashore with vials of "Smallpox lymph" from Lima Peru. Some 50 people were vaccinated (3)

About the same time Peter Kostromitinov, who was the manager of Fort Ross from 1822 to 1836, reported a severe epidemic among the Indians of Modgga which we have to be smallpox for there many casualties. (?) Shortly before 1828 a trader, Jose Verdía brought "Smallpox lymph" to California (4).

Another Russian ship arrived at Monterey Harbor in 1828 with "Smallpox vaccine" and a Dr. J. J. Richardson was employed to vaccinate as many Indians and others as possible at Carmel Mission. (5) No mention is made of the number of people treated or the possible results.

(1) Hanson, Inc. The Russian America Co. in Calif. as U.S. Berkeley, 1953 p.1 quoting from H.H. Bancroft. "Works of H.H. Bancroft. Vol. XXX. California. P.58.

(2) Cook, S.F. Smallpox in Spanish and Mexican California. 1770 - 1815 from "Bulletin of the History of Medicine. Vol. VII. No. 2. 1939, p.171.

(3) & (4) Hanson. (p53).

(5) H.H. Bancroft. History of California, Vol. 3. p.614.

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It is a matter of record that the following Russian-American Company ships from Alaska visited Monterey Harbor and the California Coast between 1817 and 1829. They came for sea otter pelts and trade goods. The KUTUSOV, in 1817, Captain Leontii Nagaielstor, and 1818, the OKHOTSK in 1818, the IMEN in 1820, Captain K. Khlebnikov, The VOLGA under Capt. K. Khlebnikov in P. Tamanin, in 1822, the BULDAKOV in 1823 under Capt. G. Viokilman, The Brig, Baikal (formerly the Arab) to San Diego, and Monterey in 1825 and 26. (6)

The best documented account of an early attempt to control smallpox in California is the Journal of James Ohio Pattie, who with his father, Sylvester Pattie and a hunting party of 16 men came to San Diego from Santa Rita, New Mexico in 1826. California Governor Jose Maria Echeandia jailed them in San Diego as possible spies. Sylvester Pattie brought a small supply of Smallpox vaccine from the mines at Santa Rita. He died of neglect in jail. (7)

A severe epidemic of Smallpox developed in Northern California in 1826. When Governor Echeandia learned that young Pattie had some vaccine and knew how to administer it, he freed Pattie and the others of the party if Pattie would undertake a program of vaccination of the residents of Alta California. Young Pattie kept a record of his activities from San Diego to San Francisco. It is remarkable to learn "-- A thousand persons were treated in San Diego, nearly four thousand at San Luis Rey, six hundred at San Juan Capistrano, more than nine hundred at San Gabriel, twenty-five hundred at the Pueblo of Los Angeles, and a larger or smaller number at each of the missions, pueblos and presidios as far north as San Francisco.--" Pattie claimed to have innoculated a total of twenty-two thousand persons during his short career as an amateur Surgeon. (8)

While awaiting his promised pay in San Francisco Pattie made a short trip to Sodega Bay and Fort Ross on the invitation of Commander Paul Shelikov in June of 1829. He claimed to have treated fifteen hundred persons in the Colony Ross. (9)

There are several factors which may explain these remarkable activities. Young Pattie started out "with a small quantity of vaccine", (1) Young Pattie augmented his supply of vaccine from sores of the arms of successful vaccinated patients, (2) He was also paid by the number of arms treated. Most of his patients had two arms. For example official counts suggest only 643 persons in the Colony Ross where Pattie claimed 1,500 vaccinations! (10)

The Russians paid Pattie one hundred dollars and a fine riding horse. On his return to San Francisco the authorities offered Pattie nine hundred head of cattle, five hundred horse and as many mules and sufficient land to pasture these animals. They also required that Pattie join the Catholic Church and become a Mexican citizen. This latter point was not in his original agreement. Pattie refused the entire offer and indignantly made his way to Monterey where he became a sailor on an American trading ship. (11).

(6) Ogden, A. The California Sea Otter Trade 178-1848. U.C. Press. 1941 BR. 168-172.

(7) Cleland, R.G. A History of California. American Period. 1923. P 72.

(8) Haase, V. The Russian-America Co. in Calif. ms. p. 54

(9) Cleland. P. 72.

(10) Haase. P. 54.

(11) Cleland. p. 73.

There is no real evidence of the effectiveness of these early attempts at the control of smallpox. The mention of hundreds of sore areas among those treated strongly suggests severe infections which may have been caused by these efforts at vaccination. Medical knowledge concerning the use of vaccines was rather crude in 1817 to 1830. Surely more research is required to answer the questions raised by this report. Records tell of several foreign ships bringing so-called "lymph," "serum" and vaccines to the State of California shortly after 1830 in an attempt to control the epidemics of smallpox.

encl.

Respectfully reported

John C. McKenzie.

In February of 1827 James Ohio Pattie and his father, Sylvester Pattie and a company of hunters and trappers were jailed in San Diego on the charge that they were spies for old Spain. His father took ill and died in prison.

When a smallpox epidemic developed in northern California and was spreading to southern California, James Ohio Pattie told the authorities that the epidemic might be slowed if he was freed and allowed to vaccinate Spanish and Indians with a vaccine which he had, which his father had brought from the Santa Rita copper mines of New Mexico. Governor Schemm agreed to release Pattie on a year's parole.

In fulfillment of this agreement and with the understanding that young Mr. Pattie would be paid for his services the trappers were freed and young Pattie began his program of vaccinating all the Mission Indians and the inhabitants of California. His pay was to be determined by the number of arms he vaccinated. It is estimated that he replenished his supply of vaccine from the sore arms he vaccinated or from cows infected with cow pox.

His record is remarkable. He treated a thousand people in San Diego, four thousand in San Luis Rey, and twenty five hundred in Los Angeles. He claimed to have vaccinated over twenty two thousand people in all. In some cases he claimed almost twice the number of patients as there were people in the villages he visited. It is possible that he counted both arms on each of his patients.

By April and May of 1828 he reached Bodega Bay, and eventually Fort Ross, and continued his vaccinations after an agreement with Karl Von Schmidt, then Commandant of the Colony Ross for the Russian American Fur Company. He was paid one hundred rubles and a fine horse for his services. Then he returned to San Francisco. For a time he worked on an American ship hunting sea Otters. He did not resume his public health work. He did not collect the money due him from the Mexican Governor.

In May of 1978 the Redwood Coast Medical Service was opened almost on the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the visit of James Ohio Pattie to his area on his public health expedition.

from the May, 1978 copy of The Independent Coast Observer, news paper.
J.C. McKegnie.

in San Diego. The first American doctors were the United States Army surgeons who came with the troops—Lewis B. Hunter and R. F. Maxwell, the surgeons of the "Cyane," and the three doctors with Frémont's battalion who arrived July 29, 1846—although at first these doctors did not remain. In November, 1846, Commodore Stockton arrived with his ships, and his surgeons did duty on shore. After the Battle of San Pasqual, they were augmented by the surgeon with Kearny's force, Dr. John T. Griffin, to whom we have alluded several times. As there was no hospital in San Diego, the wounded were quartered with private families in the town where the surgeons could visit them. From this time on, San Diego was never left without her quota of medical men.

James Ohio Pattie, a Kentucky trader, played the rôle of one of San Diego's greatest medical benefactors. It was in the days (1828) of Echeandia, the Mexican governor, that Pattie and his father arrived in San Diego. The former threw them both into jail, where the father promptly died; and James Ohio would have shared the same fate had it not been for his knowledge and possession of a medical fact and the means of making use of it. Smallpox was raging in California. Already many thousands of the Indians and Spaniards had died, and Echeandia trembled in his gubernatorial mansion. In exchange for his freedom, Pattie, who possessed some vaccine, promised to vaccinate him and everyone else in the territory; so he was liberated and began his Herculean task at San Diego with the Governor, the missionaries, and then the garrison and neophytes. From there he worked northward, eventually reaching San Francisco and the Russian colony at Bodega. In all, Pattie claims³³ that he vaccinated twenty-two thousand persons. For vaccinating the Bodega colony, the Russians gave him \$100. For his great service to the Territory of California, Padre Juan Cabortes, probably in the name of the governor, offered him five hundred cattle and five hundred mules with land on which to pasture the same, providing he would embrace Catholicism, and become a Mexican citizen, both of which propositions he refused.³⁴ But to him belongs the honor of having vaccinated at any one time more people than any other one man, doctor or otherwise, before or since in California history.

One of the earliest San Diego practitioners was Dr. George Mc Kinstry Jr., a Virginian, who practiced there for over twenty years. Before he settled there he had an adventurous career, being the first sheriff of the northern district at Sutter's Fort and a hero of the Donner party rescue, for whom on account of his medical knowledge he was

³³ Pattie, James O., *Personal Narrative*, Cincinnati 1833, p. 217.

³⁴ Bancroft, *Works*, Vol. XX, pp. 167-169.

It was deemed best to take no risks. By a false promise to their friend, the capitán de armas, they got their rifles and pistols on pretence of cleaning them, and refused to return the weapons, which were concealed in the thicket. Charles Lang, the smuggler, now made his appearance secretly,³⁷ and the trappers determined to join him. Pattie with one companion left San Diego Christmas night, and went down to Todos Santos; but learning that Lang had been arrested, they returned. Their comrades were still at liberty; no trouble was made by Echeandía about their absence or the recovery of their arms; and in January and February 1829, Pattie vaccinated everybody at the presidio and mission. On February 28th a paper was issued to each, granting liberty for a year on parole;³⁸ and Pattie obtained also a letter to the padres, who were instructed to furnish supplies and horses for the journey, and "indemnify me for my services as far as they thought proper."

Pattie started immediately on his trip northward, called at mission, presidio, and pueblo, and arrived at San Francisco the 20th of June. He had vaccinated

forms a weak point in the narrative. It is not certain, however, that they had any vaccine matter in their possession in 1828, nor is it evident that Pattie could have kept that which he had from being taken. I suppose that all is exaggerated for effect, but that Pattie may have been really employed to vaccinate. Early in 1829 a Russian vessel brought vaccine matter, and W. A. Richardson was employed that year to vaccinate at the missions; and in 1821 the Russians had vaccinated 51 persons at Monterey.

³⁷ See p. 139, this volume, for Lang's adventures.

³⁸ Pattie's *carta de seguridad* of Feb. 28th is preserved in *Dept. Rec.*, MS., vii. 80. It is as follows: 'Whereas, Santiago Ohio Pattie, who came into this territory hunting beaver in company with other foreigners, without any license whatever, in March of the past year, appears to be a North American according to a custom-house permit given in New Mexico; and whereas, the comandante of this place reports him not to be vicious but of regular conduct, in the petition presented by Pattie on the 27th of this month for permission to travel and remain in the country, there being no consul nor mercantile agent of his nation, nor any Mexican bondsman, therefore I have determined to grant him provisionally this letter of security, that he may remain and travel in this territory for one year, in accordance, so far as possible, with the laws of May 1 and Mar. 12, 1828.'

I have not found the papers of the other men under this date, but in a list of Feb. 14th, *Dept. St. Pap.*, MS., xix. 44, Pryor, Puter, and Yorgens are named, Pryor being already at S. Luis Rey. He received a *carta de seguridad* April 5th. *Id.*, xix. 18-19. It is doubtful if any of them were kept in prison after their return from the Colorado.

in all 22,000 persons,³⁹ receiving from the padres certificates by which the value of his services was to be finally estimated by a 'high dignitary' in the north. After a week's visit to Ross, where everything pleased the American, and where he received \$100 for his medical services,⁴⁰ he returned and presented his certificates to the padre at San Francisco. On July 8th John Cabortes, presumably Padre Juan Cabot, presented the amateur physician a paper, by which he gave him 500 cattle and 500 mules, with land on which to pasture the same—to be delivered when he had become a Catholic and a Mexican citizen. "When I had read this," says Pattie, "I was struck dumb. My anger choked me." But he soon recovered his speech sufficiently to give the padre his opinion in the matter, to say that he came from a country where the laws compelled a man to pay another what he justly owed him without condition of submission to "any of his whimsical desires;" that as a protestant he would not change his opinions for all the money the mission was worth, and that as an American, "rather than consent to be adopted into the society and companionship of such a band of murderers and robbers," he would suffer death. For this "honest and plain utterance" of his feelings, he was ordered to leave the house; and, keeping his rifle ready for any one the priest might send after him, he bought a horse for three dollars, and started for Monte El Rey!

At the capital Pattie shipped on an American vessel, and for several months ploughed the Pacific, touching at various ports. He does not name the vessel, and he gives no particulars of his voyage, save

³⁹ Strangely enough there is no record in the archives respecting the ravages of small-pox or Pattie's professional tour; yet his statement is confirmed by the fact that the statistical tables show an extraordinary number of deaths this year among the Indians of all the northern missions. (See note 36.) Sta Cruz, S. José, and Sta Clara do not appear to have been visited at all. Here in the extreme north only the few who had not had the small-pox were vaccinated.

⁴⁰ He had seen Don Sereldo, as he calls the Russian manager, at S. Diego, and had been implored to come to Bodega and administer his remedy.

fourth day, provided no signs of the complaint appeared; and that they were not to rub, or roughly touch the spot, should the vaccine matter have proper effect.

This done, Don Sereldo offered to accompany me through the fort and around the settlement, in order to show me the position, and every thing which might be new and interesting to me. Its situation is one of the most beautiful that I ever beheld, or that the imagination can conceive. The fort stands on the brow of a handsome hill, about two hundred feet above the level of the sea. This hill is surrounded on all sides for two miles with a charming plain. A lofty mountain whose side presents the noblest depth of forest, raises a summit, glittering with perpetual ice and snow on one hand, and on the other the level surface is lost in the waves of the sea. Clear cold streams pour down the mountain, unceasingly from different points, and glide through the plain, imparting moisture and verdure. The same multitudes of domestic animals, that are every where seen in this country, graze around in the pastures. They find abundant pasturage in the wild oats, which grow spontaneously upon this coast. Very little attention is paid to cultivation, where so many advantages are united to favor it. The amount of produce of any kind raised is small, and the inhabitants depend for bread entirely upon the Spaniards.

I remained in this delightful place one week. At the expiration of this time Don Sereldo gave me one hundred dollars, as payment for my services, and then mounted me upon a horse and conducted me back to the bay himself, and remained on the shore, until he saw me safe upon the other side.

I soon saw myself again in the presence of the Spanish priest, from whom I was to receive my recompense for the services performed on my long tour. He was not aware where I had been, until I informed him. When I had told him, he asked me what Don Sereldo had paid me? I stated this matter as it was. He then demanded of me, how I liked the coast of California? I answered, that I very much admired the appearance of the country. His next question was, how I would like the idea of living in it? It would be agreeable to me. I returned, were it subject to any other form of government. He proceeded to question me upon the ground of my

objections to the present form of government? I was careful not to satisfy him on this point.

He then handed me a written piece of paper, the translation of which is as follows:

I certify, that James O. Pattie has vaccinated all the Indians and whites on this coast, and to recompense him for the same, I give the said James O. Pattie my obligation for one thousand head of cattle, and land to pasture them; that is, 500 cows and 500 mules. This he is to receive after he becomes a Catholic, and a subject of this government. Given in the mission of St. Francisco on the 8th of July, in the year 1829.

JOHN CABORTES

When I had read this, without making use of any figure of speech, I was truck dumb. My anger choked me. As I was well aware of the fact, that this man had it in his power to hang me if I insulted him, and that here there was no law to give me redress, and compel him to pay me justly for my services, I said nothing for some time, but stood looking him full in the face. I cannot judge whether he read my displeasure, and burning feelings in my countenance, as I thus eyed him, and would have sought to pacify me, or not; but before I made a movement of any kind, he spoke, saying, 'you look displeased, sir.' Prudential considerations were sufficient to withhold me no longer, and I answered in a short manner, that I felt at that moment as though I should rejoice to find myself once more in a country where I should be justly dealt by. He asked me, what I meant when I spoke of being justly dealt by? I told him what my meaning was, and wished to be in my own country, where there are laws to compel a man to pay another what he justly owes him, without his having the power to attach to the debt, as a condition upon which the payment is to depend, the submission to, and gratification of, any of his whimsical desires. Upon this the priest's tone became loud and angry as he said, 'then you regard my proposing that you should become a Catholic, as the expression of an unjust and whimsical desire?' I told him 'yes, that I did; and that I would not change my present opinions for all the money his mission was worth; and moreover, that before I would consent to be adopted into the society and companionship of such a band of mur-

of this establishment informed me, that he did not consider it either necessary or advisable for me to proceed farther for the purpose of inoculating the inhabitants of the country, as the small pox had prevailed universally through its whole remaining extent. As I had heard, while in San Diego, great numbers had been carried off by it. I then told him that I wished to see the church officer who had been described to me by the first priest whom I had seen on my way up the coast. He furnished me a horse, and I set off for the port of San Francisco, vaccinating those whom I found on the way who had not had the small pox.

I reached the above mentioned place, on the twentieth of June, 1829. Finding the person of whom I was in search, I presented him all the certificates of the priests of the missions in which I had vaccinated, and the letter of the General. I had inoculated in all twenty two-thousand persons. After he had finished the perusal of these papers, he asked me, what I thought my services were worth? I replied, that I should leave that point entirely to his judgment and decision. He then remarked, that he must have some time to reflect upon the subject, and that I must spend a week or two with him. I consented willingly to this proposal, as I was desirous of crossing the bay of St. Francisco to the Russian settlement, called the Bodego.

I proceeded to carry my wish into execution on the 23d, accompanied by two Coriac Indians, whose occupation was the killing of sea otters for the Russians, who hire them into their service. Those who pursue this employment, have water crafts made of the sea lions' skins, in the shape of a canoe. Over this spreads a top, completely covered in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of the entrance of any water. An opening is left at the bow and stern, over which the person who has entered draws a covering made of the same material with that of the boat, which fastens firmly over the aperture in such a manner, as to make this part entirely water proof, as any other portion of the boat. Two persons generally occupy it. No position can be more secure than theirs, from all the dangers of the sea. The waves dash over them harmless. The occupants are stationed, one at the bow, and the other at the stern; the latter guides the boat, while the other is provided with a spear,

which he darts into the otter whenever he comes within its reach. Great numbers are thus taken.

But to return to myself: We crossed the bay, which is about three miles in width. It is made by the entrance of a considerable river, called by the Spaniards Rio de San Francisco. After we reached the north shore, we travelled through a beautiful country, with a rich soil, well watered and timbered, and reached the Russian settlement in the night, having come a distance of thirty miles. As our journey had been made on foot, and we had eaten nothing, I was exceedingly fatigued and hungry. I accompanied my fellow travellers, who belonged here, to their wigwams, where I obtained some food, and a seal skin to sleep upon. Early in the morning I arose, and learning from one of my late companions where was the dwelling of the commander of the place, I proceeded towards it. I had become acquainted with this person while I was vaccinating the inhabitants of San Diego. He came there in a brig, and insisted upon my promising him that I would come and communicate the remedy to the people of his establishments, offering to recompense me for my services. I agreed to do what he wished, should it be in my power. Accordingly, finding that the Spaniard did not intend to keep a strict guard over my movements, I availed myself of this opportunity of fulfilling the expressed wish of Don Sereldo, for so was he called. I reached the place pointed out to me by the friendly Indian, and was received by the above mentioned gentleman with the warmest expressions of kindness and friendship. He said that so long a time had elapsed since he saw me, he was afraid I had forgotten our conversation together, and that circumstances had rendered my coming to him impossible. He had suffered greatly from the fear that the small pox would spread among his people, before he should be enabled to prevent danger from it, through the means of the kine pox.

After breakfast, he circulated an order among the people, for all who wished to be provided with a safe guard against the terrible malady that had approached them so near, to come to his door. In a few hours I began my operations; and continued to be constantly occupied for three days, vaccinating during this period fifteen hundred individuals. I reminded them all that they must return on the